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## CRITICAL NOTES

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### IS THE "TWO-NATURE" THEORY OF THE INCARNATION A MYSTERY OR A CONTRADICTION?

Articles by Professor Warfield on "The 'Two Natures' and Recent Christological Speculation," in the *American Journal of Theology* for July and October, 1911, raise anew old questions, but questions which must be considered anew if their subject-matter is to have any meaning for the mind familiar with the psychology and other sciences of today. In these articles Professor Warfield speaks quite seriously of "so simple a hypothesis, as that of the two natures," and says "It presents itself to us, not as the creator but as the solvent of difficulties." The writer does not admit Warfield's theses, "No two natures, no incarnation; no incarnation, no Christianity in any distinctive sense," and yet if it should ever come to a choice between teaching the *truth* and abandoning the idea of Christianity as *distinctive*, he would prefer the former. It would seem to be more in harmony with the will of God, the spirit of Christ and the welfare of humanity.

The definitions of the word "mystery" given in the *Standard Dictionary*, are: "Something unknown or incomprehensible in its nature; that which is kept concealed or is very obscure and hence excites awe or curiosity; an unexplained or inexplicable phenomenon." Probably the first and third of these definitions would fairly express what is generally meant by scholars in speaking of the incarnation as a mystery. It is something unknown or incomprehensible, unexplained or inexplicable. The introduction to Fairbairn's *Philosophy of the Christian Religion* is an interesting discussion of mystery in religion and particularly the mystery of the incarnation. He finds in the history of religion two kinds of mystery, the first that of Nature, which becomes the more impenetrable, the more carefully it is examined by the reason; and the second the mystery of art, which "shows itself in the skill with which it blends the fantastic with the real, and out of the impossible weaves the very texture of life." He then proceeds to illustrate and analyze these two kinds of mystery, the first, that which remains inexplicable because reason cannot go far enough, and the second, which remains inexplicable because it is impossible or involves contradiction. He finds the incarnation to belong to the first variety.

It is no argument against faith in God that the believer cannot harmonize the different phases of his belief completely, or show the exact relation of his belief to the facts of common experience. It is, however, an argument against the *form* of a belief, that it involves mutually contradictory elements. We cannot demand of a theologian that he give us a clear and adequate conception of God, his power, and his knowledge, his mode of existence and of operation. If God be infinite and man finite, man will not be able completely to comprehend God. We have a right, however, to require of a theologian that he define the words which he uses to describe God and his works, and that that description which he gives shall not involve evident contradictions. "Mystery" is the name which has always been given to a contradiction in religion by one who wished to defend it as credible and true, but surely a scientific theologian of today cannot permit himself to revert to such scholastic methods.

We desire, therefore, in the interests of truth, to state some questions with regard to the traditional doctrine of the incarnation, and inquire whether a fair definition of the meaning of the items of the belief will involve real mystery or evident contradiction.

The doctrine of the incarnation is, of course, inseparable from the doctrine of God, and if we are affirming identity of person, or personality or nature, we require to define those terms if they mean anything at all. We assume that the Christian theologian is monotheistic, and that his trinitarianism and Christology must be harmonious with his monotheism, i.e., the monotheism and Christology must not be mutually contradictory. We assume also that this monotheism is theistic, i.e., that it is a doctrine of one *personal* God. There is no doubt that very many Christian people believe in three gods, who by some "mystery" are one, and consider that they are very "orthodox" in so doing. A theologian, however, must be able to define his trinitarianism so as to guard his monotheism, and his theism, since he undertakes to be scientific.

1. The first question, therefore, concerns the doctrine of the personality of God. What is meant by saying that God is one person? Of course we do not need to point out the familiar fact that when the intelligent theologian speaks of God as "subsisting in three persons," he does not use the word person in the ordinary English sense, nor in the same sense in which he uses the idea of person in speaking of the personality of God. Our question now is, "What do we mean by the doctrine of the personality of God? How far is the word personality, when applied to God, to be defined as it is used in reference to human beings?

Do we mean a unified self-consciousness, in which thought and feeling are present, and in which what is not self is distinguishable from the self? Is God a being who is conscious of his personal identity as distinguished from the identity of any and all other spiritual beings? Is there such a unity to his knowledge, thought, and purpose that he distinguishes it from the knowledge, thought, and purpose of every other personal being, great or small, mighty or weak, however similar the knowledge, thought; and purpose of those other personalities may be to his own? Is God one and personal in such a way as to exclude the idea that there is one self-consciousness complete in itself, which has a certain attitude toward men, e.g., that of determination to give all men exact justice, and another complete self-consciousness (i.e., at least as complete as we know it in any human being) which has a somewhat different attitude toward men, more loving—less severe—and that these two self-consciousnesses with different attitudes toward men are at the same time one God or parts of one God? Of course we know that Roman Catholics and others have held such ideas of God (as that the "Son" was more loving toward men than the "Father"), but we believe that the Protestant theologians would regard that as inconsistent with monotheism. Although we cannot comprehend God, surely we are justified in asking for a definition of what we *mean* by *calling* God personal and one, in some such terms as these! With these explanations, may we again state our first question as follows: *A. Does belief in one personal God mean belief in one self-consciousness, conscious of thought and purpose, and of difference of identity from all other personalities or self-consciousnesses?* We suppose that the Christian theologian's answer to this question would be yes, and hope that if it be otherwise answered, the difference of conception can be made clear.

2. The second question to which an answer must be given, if the conception of the incarnation is to be made definite enough for scientific consideration, concerns the meaning of humanity. What is a human being? And before asking for the definition, we should consider the purpose in view of which it is to be defined. Orthodox theology has never admitted our right to have any question about the real and genuine humanity of Jesus, because that was necessary to other doctrines, particularly that of the atonement. We know Anselm's theory which, in considering the humanity of Jesus, found it necessary that a descendant of Adam, and real member of the human race, should suffer for the sin of the race, as the only possible ground of its pardon. And we know President Mackenzie's theory that "the essence of the great

act [the incarnation] lies in this . . . that the Eternal Self willed to taste human experience from the human side, to know it as the created, dependent, growing, struggling, attaining human spirit alone can know it." And we know of various other theories, but all require a genuine human being, *that is*, one who is like other human beings in essence. The doctrine of Jesus as the perfect example, and type of perfected humanity requires this same conception. He must be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" and "tempted in all points like as we are" if he is to be in any true sense our model.

We ask then with regard to the meaning of humanity, our second main question: *B. Do we mean by a human being a self-consciousness, conscious of its own identity and of difference of identity from all other spiritual beings, and of the limitations of knowledge and power which belong with human flesh?* Professor Warfield in the second of the articles referred to has well said that we cannot use the idea of multiple personality, as we find it in abnormal human beings in recent psychological investigations, to explain the personality of Jesus. He must be *the normal* man, and must have a unified consciousness, not an alternating one. We do not see any possibility of giving other than an affirmative answer to this question, if we are to mean the same thing by humanity when speaking of the incarnation that we mean in speaking of any sane, healthy human being besides Jesus. If there be a possible difference of opinion here, may we have it stated and defended?

3. The third question is as to the reconciling of the idea of the incarnation with the conception of the personality of God, and the conception of the nature of humanity or specifically of Jesus as a human being. We hold, of course, that while Jesus lived in Palestine as a man, the Infinite Mind, God, was still active in the universe, immanent in it, controlling it, and not that it was left to run itself while God played the part of man for a few years. If questions A and B be answered affirmatively, then, *C. Must we not say that during his life on earth, at any rate, the infinite God and the finite man Jesus were two separate personalities, each conscious of itself and of its difference from the other in identity, however alike in character and purpose?* Surely if Jesus was a man, he was conscious of both self and non-self, and when he prayed he was not praying to himself, he was praying to a Father who was a different consciousness from himself, a separate spiritual being, or his prayer has not the slightest resemblance to any prayer that we may pray.

If then question C be answered affirmatively, and we believe that there is but one God, we must say that Jesus in his *earthly* life was not God in the

*complete* sense of that term. That is (a) he was not personally identical with God, and (b) he was not infinite as God, but limited as man. If we accept the title of Son of God as used by him of himself or properly referred to him during his earthly life, then it must mean something else than the possession of infinite power and knowledge, kinetically—that is having such power and knowledge to *use* to meet his needs and accomplish his work on earth, and that title must mean something else than personal identity with the Father of whom he taught and to whom he prayed. Surely the words “son” and “father” suggest difference of person, not identity, and the idea of a *man* in possession of infinite power and knowledge is so evident a contradiction in thought that probably every man worthy of being called a theologian at the present time, must at least hold to some kind of a *kenosis* if he holds to any kind of a personal identity of Jesus with God. In other words, whatever Jesus was before and after his human life, during it he was in some measure “empty” of the infinite powers of God, empty enough to be a real man, limited in the same *way* even if not in the same *degree* as each of us. And of course there is this very serious objection to the doctrine of the *kenosis*, when used to explain and describe the *humanity* of Jesus, that (a) no other normal human being could believe himself to be or to have ever been personally identical with God, and (b) any *memory*, *knowledge*, or *certainty* that he had been and was to be infinite in knowledge and power, would seem to put him outside the category of real human beings as effectively as any docetic theory could possibly do. If I *knew* instead of *believing* that I had a personal, loving, infinite God for my father, nay far more, that I myself as a personal spiritual being, had been and was to be infinite in knowledge and power, it would be absurdly false for anyone to say that I was tempted in all points like other men. No one is tempted, in the moral sense, to disbelieve that which he *knows* to be true, but the greatest temptation of all is to lack *faith* in God and in good, since we do *not know* their truth and power.

4. But assuming the doctrine of the *kenosis* as necessary to any present-day defense of the idea of the “mystery” of the incarnation, and admitting, as apparently we must, that it involves at least a temporary difference of identity between God the Father and Jesus, what does it further involve in the *plerosis* which is inevitably involved in the kenotic theory? We have then as the next question: *D. If after the earthly life of Jesus there was a personal identity between him and God, can that be conceived in any other way than by the ceasing of the consciousness of Jesus to exist, altogether?* We are assuming, because it is the only assumption which

seems to us possible, that during the earthly life of Jesus, he was separate or different in personal identity from God, having a normal unified human consciousness. Let us try to imagine that consciousness suddenly expanding in the plerosis, to infinite attributes, knowledge, power, etc. Then either we have the consciousness of Jesus as an individual, Son of God, if you please, but separate in identity from the Father, continuing, with the memory of past experiences on earth as his own, just as the thoughts and feelings I have had are in a special sense my own, and no one's else, not even God's although He may know them well—we have this continuance of the same consciousness although with suddenly increased powers, and a continuance of two separate personalities—that is, we have *two Gods*, or else there is but the continuance of the consciousness of the *Father* as divine in power and knowledge, and the *absorption* into it, if you can imagine such a thing, of the consciousness of the Son. In that case Jesus ceases to exist as a self-conscious being which is the only form of spiritual existence of which we have any knowledge or any definite conception.

To recapitulate: By a personal, spiritual being, whether God or man, we mean a self-consciousness, conscious of its own identity and of its difference of identity from all other personal beings. We must hold that God is such a being and that every man is such a being in normal (that is healthy) conditions. If Jesus was a man he must have had such a consciousness, and that must have been different in identity from that of God. After the earthly life of Jesus, the two separate consciousnesses of God and Jesus must have continued separate in identity, or one must have been merged in the other and hence gone out of existence as a *self-consciousness*. Whatever mysterious human “substance” or “essence” remained, the self-consciousness which is to us the mark and only condition of personal existence, must have disappeared entirely. Thus the plerosis would be annihilation so far as the personality of Jesus was concerned.

We need hardly point out that the goal at which we have arrived by analysis of our *conceptions* of human and divine personality, is not that at which those who hold to the mystery of the incarnation would desire us to come, or the fact that the conception of the pre-existence of Jesus would be subject to the same difficulty, in view of the problem of personality and personal identity, as that of post-existence. And after all are we not most interested to know not what Jesus was before the incarnation nor after it, but during it, when, so to speak, we have him under our observation and not merely as a subject for speculation?

And during this period we must say that he either had a self-consciousness which was identical with that of God, or one which was separate in identity. But the former hypothesis does not find the slightest inkling of support in the writings of the New Testament. The Son is never thought of as being the *same* with the Father, however he may be thought of as being equal to the Father. And if he had a consciousness separate in identity from that of God, and really human, then we could not properly say that he was *God*, even though we may well say that he was *divine* in nature and character and a unique revelation of God, God manifest in the flesh or incarnate—for those terms *may* be used to indicate a revelation of nature and character and not a description of personal identity. It seems plain, then, that to say that Jesus was a man and at the same time personally identical with God is to propound not a mystery but a contradiction. To say that he was a real man who by means of his character of righteousness and love was a revelation of God in human form involves no contradiction although doubtless some mystery.

Let it be noted that we have not argued against any facts or even reputed facts, against the supernatural or miraculous. We have been discussing our *conceptions* and their use in dogmatic forms, and we have seen that to use the traditional forms of dogma with the conceptions which we have today, involves us not in real mystery but in contradiction. We cannot therefore justify ourselves or commend others in the statement of faith in contradictory forms.

It is probably true that most people actually believe things which are mutually contradictory, not realizing the contradictory and, therefore, false character of some of their beliefs. We have no sufficient reason for thinking that the authors of the New Testament Scriptures were able to harmonize perfectly all the different articles of their faith. It seems probable, however, that a different interpretation of their writings from that indicated by the traditional theological systems might show that the elements of their faith were more harmonious than they have been represented, and in view of the thoughts and theories of the world, then prevalent, which have now been abandoned by intelligent men, were a fairly reasonable interpretation of the experiences which they had. To find out what the facts were which they thus interpreted is one of our great tasks, but it can hardly be accomplished by accepting as valid a theory in which contradictory elements are evident.

The writer confesses that he has been unable, although not unwilling or undesirous, to find any way of thinking the two-nature theory as



maintained in these articles of Warfield's, or the writings of Forsythe, or any others which he has had the privilege of reading, which avoids contradictory elements in its conception or statement, and believes that if it *can* be conceived or stated so as to avoid such elements of contradiction, *and* the theory be then found to have value not only as a key to ancient narratives and creeds but as a principle of interpretation of life and of the universe, of man and God, it would be a great achievement for its defenders so to state it.

E. ALBERT COOK

CONGREGATIONAL COLLEGE OF CANADA

### LUKE 17:20-21. AN EXEGETICAL STUDY

The Greek text of Luke 17:20-21 is free from variants of exegetical significance and is printed by all modern editors as follows:

Ἐπερωτηθεὶς δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν Φαρισαίων πότε ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀπεκρίθη αὐτοῖς καὶ εἶπεν· οὐκ ἔρχεται ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ παρατηρήσεως, οὐδὲ ἐροῦσιν· ἰδοὺ ὧδε ἡ· ἐκεῖ· ἰδοὺ γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν.

Both Revised Versions agree in their rendition of the passage: "And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God cometh, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, There! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you." And both Versions give as a marginal alternative for the last two words the translation, "in the midst of you."

Three words only cause real difficulty in translation, namely, *παρατήρησις*, *ἐντός*, and *ἐστίν*—"observation," "within," and "is." The first of these is found only here in the New Testament and not at all in the LXX, but in "secular" Greek it is not uncommon. Its meaning is "observation" in almost any sense of the word, as for instance, "astronomic observation" (Diodorus i. 28), "medical observation of the course of a disease"<sup>1</sup> (Galen, *De Opt.* i. 109), "observation of a festival" (*Ad Diognet.* iv. 5), etc. In the present passage, however, *μετὰ παρατηρήσεως*, "with observation" (preposition of attendant circumstances) can mean only "so that it can be perceived." But whether this "observation" is to be gained by signs accompanying or preceding the phenomenon can be settled only from the context.

The case of *ἐντός* is more complicated. The word is common enough in secular Greek and before a noun or a pronoun in the singular

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, p. 153.